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H - PLEASE PASS TO CODEL CONAWAY; ALSO FOR NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [OREP](#) [CONAWAY](#) [MICHAEL](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: TUNISIA: CODEL CONAWAY RAISES INTELLIGENCE
COOPERATION AND MIDDLE EAST PEACE WITH FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified by Ambassador Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

Summary

11. (S/NF) Representative Michael Conaway (R-TX) and Tunisian Foreign Minister Abdelwaheb Abdallah discussed intelligence cooperation, the Middle East peace process, and bilateral trade, investment, and assistance during a December 19 meeting. Abdallah indicated his willingness to discuss U.S. concerns over intelligence cooperation and expressed his appreciation for additional military assistance in the FY 2010 budget. He criticized the Israeli position on Middle East peace and highlighted Tunisia's moderate stance. End summary.

Intelligence Cooperation

12. (S/NF) Representative Michael Conaway (R-TX) met with Tunisian Foreign Minister Abdallah and Defense Minister Kemal Morjane (septel) the morning of December 19. Recalling the importance of the U.S.-Tunisia relationship, Rep. Conaway explained to Minister Abdallah that the main purpose of his visit was to discuss bilateral intelligence cooperation. As a member of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Rep. Conaway stressed the importance of working together against Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. Abdallah replied that Tunisia and the United States cooperate well on intelligence, a very important issue for President Ben Ali, and suggested that he was open to discussing any problems in this area. Ambassador Gray indicated to Abdallah that he would like an opportunity to meet with him separately to raise U.S. concerns on intelligence cooperation. (That meeting took place on December 21 and is being reported in separate channels.)

Middle East Peace

13. (C) Rep. Conaway urged Minister Abdallah to leverage Tunisia's influence with the Israeli and Palestinian sides to advocate a peaceful solution to the long-running conflict. Abdallah replied that progress on Middle East peace was held back by the "intransigent" attitude of the Israeli government. He indicated that in his recent meeting with a delegation from the American Jewish Committee, he had underlined the need for the Israeli side to make a gesture to advance progress toward talks. Abdallah opined that the recent European Union declaration was a positive step, but that it was still necessary to push the Israeli government to stop settlement activity and to begin negotiations. Abdallah

praised the role of Special Envoy Mitchell but said that Tunisia could not agree to his request to normalize relations with Israel in the current context, as doing so would go against public opinion in the Arab world and in Tunisia itself. Abdallah stressed, however, his confidence in President Obama, Secretary Clinton, and in the vision of the President's Cairo speech, and pledged to use Tunisia's "privileged" relationship with the Palestinians to support the peace process.

Bilateral Relations

¶4. (C) Rep. Conaway said he hoped to see an increase in trade and tourism, and promised to promote awareness of Tunisia in the Congress. Abdallah noted the potential for an Open Skies agreement and other means to promote bilateral trade and tourism. He thanked Rep. Conaway for the increased military assistance figures in the FY 2010 budget, noting the positive spirit of cooperation implied by the new figure. Signaling an expected drop in FMF levels in 2011, Rep. Conaway replied that with a growing public debt, the United States may not be able to continue to maintain these levels in all areas in future years.

¶5. (U) Representative Conaway did not have the opportunity to clear this message before leaving Tunis.

GRAY